

The Ups and Downs



Photo by Rae Mack

When a command leased a bucket truck like this, they were delivered a crane instead—and the person operating it didn't know it was a crane.

By Meg White

An employee was about 30 feet from the ground in the basket of a 100-foot crane, which was being operated by another worker. The outriggers were not down, and the crane toppled over. The basket fell, with the employee still inside. The operator of the crane was not qualified to do so. In fact, he didn't realize it was a crane; he thought he was operating a bucket truck.

Fortunately, the employee inside the basket lived. However, he sustained multiple fractures causing him to be permanently disabled. The crane also had major damage.

In reviewing this incident, investigators discovered that this piece of equipment had been leased

without being inspected in accordance with command instructions. The delivery order identified the equipment as a basket truck rather than a crane, and the person who accepted the equipment was not knowledgeable enough to recognize the difference.

None of the employees were licensed crane operators; therefore, no one should have been operating the equipment in the first place. If they had been licensed and had followed the correct procedures, this mishap probably wouldn't have occurred.

Because of the rising costs of buying and maintaining heavy equipment, the government is turning to leasing as a way to save money. Mishaps, near misses and injuries will increase if we fail to pay close attention to the process involved in leasing and the risks associated with it.

If the equipment is leased for more than one workday, the government is often responsible for performing operational-type services, such as fueling, lubricating, servicing batteries, checking air pressure in tires, and adding and changing oil. The contractor will specify how often these services are to be performed. The contractor is responsible for maintaining the equipment in good operating condition during the leased period and for doing all the preventive-maintenance checks.

If the equipment must be removed from service during the leased period, the contractor may provide another piece of equipment or deduct costs during the time the equipment is out for maintenance.

Downs of Leasing

It is the contractor's responsibility to ensure that equipment is free from defects, in good operating condition, and deemed safe before the government leases it. The contractor also must keep maintenance records on the equipment and provide them to the organization that is leasing. The same goes for the owner or operating manuals, safety alerts and recall notices.

The organization leasing equipment has responsibilities as well. It is responsible for obtaining all documents that accompany the piece of equipment and should refuse to accept any equipment if the contractor fails to provide the maintenance records. It is responsible for inspecting the equipment before leasing it to ensure it is in good condition. It also must make sure the contract is written correctly so the equipment received is the same equipment that is requested. For example, in the case above, the delivery order was written incorrectly, and no one checked it to make sure the piece of equipment delivered was what was requested.

Unless specified in the contract, companies leasing equipment are not required to provide training on equipment being leased. Organizations must make sure that the people operating the equipment are trained and licensed. Operators are also responsible for performing daily checks on equipment. The operator's manual should specify what those daily checks include.

Any government organization that leases equipment must pay close attention to the terms of the lease to make sure they are providing the safest environment possible for their workers.

It is also crucial that operators apply operational risk management (ORM) before using any equipment, leased or not. For more information on ORM or to receive specialized training in ORM, contact the Safety Center at (757) 444-3520 (DSN 564). [A](#)

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